UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/Sub.2/1993/NGO/12
5 August 1993

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities
Forty-fifth session
Agenda item 17

PROTECTION OF MINORITIES

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Human Rights, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is distributed in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[5 August 1993]

THE SITUATION OF THE KURDS IN THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

1. The International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH) and its Syrian affiliate, the organization of the Committees for the Defence of Democratic Freedoms and Human Rights (CDF), are extremely concerned about the situation of the Kurdish minority in the Syrian Arab Republic.

2. At present, the number of Syrian Kurds may be estimated at 1.5 million, of whom more than 150,000 have no documents proving their nationality. The Kurds make up 10 per cent of the Syrian population (15 million inhabitants), with three quarters of them settled in Kurd-Dagh and in the southern part of Jazira. The others are scattered all over the northern and north-eastern parts of the country, between Ain al-Arab, the northern part of Jazira, the Sama'an and Aziz mountains and the cities of Aleppo, Hama and Damascus.

3. The presence of Kurds in Kurd-Dagh was mentioned in the first Arabic texts written about the region. In the Abassid and Ottoman eras, relations between Arabs and Kurds were good and, from the time of Syria's independence on 17 April 1946 until 1962, a spirit of tolerance and cooperation prevailed in relations between the two peoples. The Kurdish poet Geguershwin published his books in Kurdish and Kurdish spelling books circulated freely in the country.

4. The Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) was founded in 1957 and carried out its activities freely until the unification with Egypt in 1959, when the decision was taken to disband political parties and the party leaders who had rejected that arbitrary decision were arrested (Syrian Communist Party, KDP).

5. In September 1961, when the Syrian-Egyptian union ended, political prisoners were released, but there was an atmosphere of suspicion towards the Kurdish nationalists who had supported the revolt by Iraqi Kurds which had taken place that same year. On 23 August 1962, the Syrian Government promulgated Decree-Law No. 93, called "the Arab Belt" (al-Hizam al-Arabi), authorizing a special population census in Jazira and providing for the expulsion of the Kurdish population settled along the border with Turkey. On 5 October 1962, some 120,000 Kurds were excluded from the census and thus regarded as foreigners.

6. After the declaration, on 8 March 1963, of the state of emergency which is still in force, the Baath party published a study on Jazira prepared by the head of the political police force of that governorate (Muhafaza). The study proposed 12 measures, including the transfer of the population of the governorate, the denial of all education (tajhil or "obscurantization"), whether in Kurdish or in Arabic, and means of subsistence (tajwi or "starvation") and the suspension of the civil rights of all those who do not speak Arabic, and concluded with the following words: "The Kurdish people is a people with no history, no civilization, no language and no ethnic origin. Its only qualities are those of force, destructive power and violence, which are, moreover, inherent in all mountain populations". The plan proposed in this study is thus a genuine campaign against the very existence of the Kurds in the country and establishes a discriminatory policy against them as a minority.

7. When General Assad came to power in 1970, this plan was slowed down, but not repealed and the number of Kurdish seats in the people's assembly was imposed, thereby curbing the political trend towards democratization in the region. Those who took part in action to combat the Arab-Kurdish social and political opposition benefited from naturalization, unlike the other Kurds, who continued to be regarded as Turks.

8. On 11 November 1986 the Governor of Al Hasakah promulgated Decree No. 1012/SAD/25 prohibiting the use of the Kurdish language in places of work. On 3 December 1989, Governor Mohammed Mustafa Miro extended this prohibition and also banned non-Arabic songs at weddings and celebrations, in blatant contravention of articles 25, 26, 27, 37, 38 and 47 of the Syrian Constitution (The Voice of Democracy, the CDF newspaper, published this Decree in its November 1990 issue).

9. To mark the thirtieth anniversary of the entry into force of the Act of 5 October 1962, four Kurdish political organizations in the Syrian Arab Republic published tracts on 5 October 1992 calling on Syrian citizens to support equal civil and cultural rights for the Kurds. Following these demonstrations, nearly 260 Kurds were arrested and questioned and 40 of them, including Ahmad Hasso, Alaeddin Imam, Ibrahim Buzan, Alaeddin Ahmad, Khalil Mustafa, Umar Haj al-Ammo, Musa Hussein, Sharif Shukri, Muhammed al-Bassous and Abdelnaser Hasso, are still in prison.

10. This campaign was accompanied by several clearly discriminatory decisions against the Kurdish minority, including:

The dismissal of 21 Kurdish workers from the Public Road Construction Company (a list of their names is available);

The prohibition on travel by Kurdish intellectuals;

The prohibition of the setting-up of publishing companies, bookshops, cultural centres and any other Kurdish associations;

In accordance with Decree No. 122 of 3 September 1992, officials of the Registry Office are prohibited from registering children with Kurdish first names and, as a result, since October 1992, dozens of Kurdish children have not been registered because their parents continue to give them Kurdish names.

11. Very recently, on 24 March 1993, Al-Hasakah prison was devastated by fire and more than 57 prisoners died, most of them Kurds. Four of them were political prisoners. Although we cannot determine the exact causes of the fire, the military investigation unit set up by the Ministry of the Interior is far from credible. It is therefore essential that an independent judicial inquiry should be carried out to determine the real causes of the tragedy.

12. FIDH and CDF request the Sub-Commission to intervene to ensure respect for the civil, political and socio-cultural rights of the Kurdish minority in the Syrian Arab Republic, since its existence is not even recognized in the Constitution.